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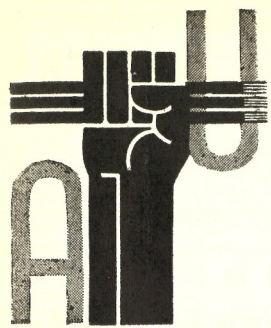
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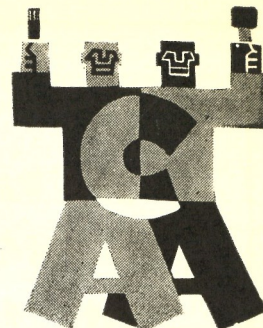
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ART FRONT

MAY 1936



THINKING IT OVER

IN the hurry of going to press last month, we noted that eight members of the American Society of Painters, Sculptors and Gravers had refused to send their paintings to the coming Carnegie show. The issue is that the Carnegie outfit can't see paying the meagre rental fee. The facts are that from 23 to 26 painters of the Society have refused the invitations, and that no member of the Society has accepted to show. These refusals represent one-third of the total number of artists invited to the American Section of the exhibition. Those who have followed the rental policy fight will recall that the organization of museum directors ridiculed the idea from the start and wouldn't negotiate. Now comes a proposal from the Association of Museum Directors that the Society get together with them in conference over the matter. It would be quite a dent in the Carnegie show at that. Between now and the opening a majority of the big shots may sober up.

A GROWING FORCE

IN the short space of time that the Commercial Artists Section has been in existence, it has made definite advances, in spite of limited funds, man power, and experience. A large part of the errors made was largely due to lack of a trained organizer, but we are taking steps to remedy this immediately.

Because of lack of trained leadership, we have been sidetracked on many occasions from our program of organization. We have over-stressed at times the cultural side of our work, at the expense of definite union activity.

The reason for this is that we have been outstandingly successful in the symposiums we have sponsored, featuring the leading figures in our field who have voiced from our platform their strong approval of our aims, and their willingness

to support us to every extent. Nationally famous artists, like Steichen; Bernhard; Sinel; Grasstrom, the famous illustrator; Gordon Aymar, noted art director, and Russell Patterson, the well known humorist artist—all have lent their services to the Union on numerous occasions.

These forums have brought together many hundreds of artists in discussion of



Anton Refregier

the vital economic and cultural problems which affect their lives. For many of them, this has been the first time they have joined with their fellow artists on any issue whatsoever. Naturally, these forums have added much to the prestige of the Union. But because we did not organize ourselves sufficiently to handle the great crowds that turned out, we gained very little in increased membership from these efforts.

Our cultural programs, as we are planning them now, will be more consciously an instrument for the building of the Union. The first symposium under this new plan took place on Monday, March 16th, at the Hotel Delano. The subject,

"Speculation and the Free-Lance Artist," was of utmost interest to all commercial artists.

But what made this discussion a momentous step in our history is the fact that we succeeded in drawing into it delegates and speakers from the foremost artists' organizations in the city: The Artists Guild, The Society of Illustrators, The Art Directors Club, The Photo Illustrators Club, and the Photographers Union. As a result of this meeting, unified resolutions against speculation have been formulated and put into action.

The help of the Photographers Union, of the American Federation of Labor, in our work has been an important step towards the building of a powerful Graphic Arts Council, one of the primary aims of our section. Such a council would eventually include engravers, printers, photographers, typographers—all those engaged in the creation and reproduction of commercial art. When finally developed, this council should prove to be a most effective force in maintaining the living and working standards of all these allied crafts. Our "united front" symposium on Speculation, described above, is another step towards such an organization.

On April 4th, we staged the first great costume ball ever held exclusively for commercial artists. Nationally known figures, such as Russell Patterson, Tony Sarg, Grafstrom, Hoff, Mellisse, Corcos, and Adward A. Wilson acted as judges and sponsors of this affair, whose theme was "Kidding the Ads." As a result of the ball, we hope to have in our hands sufficient funds to employ the trained organizer we need so badly.

This in brief is a record of our first year's work. In the coming year, we hope to see much more tangible results. We urge all New York's commercial artists to join our section and help in building a powerful trade union.

If out of town commercial artists have any inquiries, they may address them to Ben Lassen, at the Artists Union, 430 Sixth Avenue, New York City.

Pier, by
Joseph Vogel

*Courtesy Federal Project
Graphic Show*



MAY DAY AND THE ARTISTS

THIS May Day will unite the ranks of labor in concerted action for their needs. For the first time since the World War, one united demonstration will call out the thousandfold demands of the exploited as a single voice.

What significance does this fact have for the artists?

The stronger the labor movement, the stronger the Artists Union. The greater the pressure of labor upon the Administration, the more concessions the Administration will find it necessary to make in order to maintain its position and to retain the confidence of organized labor. This means that art projects will be perpetuated and extended, together with other projects; this means that social security will be broadened; it means that reactionary legislation will be nipped in the bud. In a word, the demands of labor, including artistic creative labor,

will be more far-reaching and better organized. The Administration will not be able to ignore so powerful a mandate.

May First is steeped in American labor traditions, and in the blood of its best sons. The McCormick strikers were shot down and the Haymarket martyrs were hanged to galvanize workers into united action. The struggle for the eight-hour day took place around the banner of the First of May. And yet, while May Day is natively American, it is also international in effect. This fact is what strikes particular fear into the hearts of the patrioteers, who would herd the American people into the horrors of fascist reaction and war. May Day fosters the concept of universal brotherhood of all the exploited and oppressed of all lands; it unites labor regardless of geographic boundaries and national prejudices.

The fact that millions of laboring peo-

ple are marching together with common grievances, needs and victorious achievements, not only in America but throughout the world, cannot but give heart and impulse to those who waver, to those who are yet unorganized. The tremendous effect of unity of action on May Day will go far toward getting jobs and extending projects, not only for artists, but for all workers in all fields.

NOSE FOR NEWS

IT is rare indeed for this department to lose its equanimity. Busy as it is culling the news day by day in line of duty, its nose, so to speak, is sensitive for items of interest. Of late, however, the atmosphere has been so heavily laden with a nasty odor that we have been impervious to anything else.

We refer, of course, to the activities

of Mr. Ridder, who took over the job of policing the W.P.A. from General Johnson. The General was no rose. He had a nasty labor record (he was barred from the Newspaper Guild for this reason). But the General was at least an amusing fellow and a colorful character. Not so, however, Herr Ridder. We find nothing amusing in his strange and contradictory babblings to the press.

Preaching violence against the W.P.A. workers, he characterized them as rats, shirkers, agitators, etc. We no sooner felt smugly ratty, however, than he took it all back and caressed us as honest workers. Quite willingly we accepted our former position, only to be informed through the press on the following day that we were rats again and should be clubbed into submission. As Herr Ridder playfully puts it, we won't need gas bombs, clubs will do the trick. This was the Nazi party in action. These were Herr Streicher's epithets. These were the rantings of a democracy hater. A phrase kept recurring to us, "It can't happen here." But it is happening here!

We thought, of course, of dismissing the whole business as the ravings of a madman, but we remembered that Harry Hopkins, who should know what he's talking about, said Mr. Ridder was doing a "good job."

This department is utterly unable to cope with a situation of this nature. We hereby turn our duties over to some one with a strong stomach and a very rudimentary sense of smell.

TOWARDS PERMANENT PROJECTS

THE economic status of the artist has always been insecure. Tied to the strings of patronage, his lot has been a precarious one. At the first sign of the depression, the patronage system entirely collapsed, leaving the artist economically stranded.

As a group the artists were the first to feel the pinch of extreme poverty as a result of the world-wide economic collapse, and the last to appeal as a group for relief. As the depression relentlessly persisted, interest in the arts became intensified. On the other hand, the market for contemporary works of art was shrinking to the vanishing point. The irony of this contradiction is apparent.

The W.P.A. has temporarily salvaged many artists; it made a start in bringing to communities the cultural activities so sorely needed. But this is only a start. Hundreds of artists are still unemployed. Cultural and educational activities already started may be terminated at any moment, and those artists fortunate enough to be

employed have constantly the vision of the "axe of retrenchment" hanging over their heads. The communities need a broad and permanent program of cultural and educational activities. The artist needs security and the chance to exercise his talents.

With lay-offs coming thick and fast and the whole W.P.A. jeopardized, the white collar W.P.A. workers swung into action. Under the leadership of the City Projects Council, the parent body of all W.P.A. white collar organizations, a constant stream of activity was planned. Picket lines were thrown around the Port Authority Building daily, each local of the City Projects Council participating. A torchlight parade acquainted the public with the plight of the project workers. This activity was daily accelerated, and finally terminated in a tremendous mass meeting as its climax.

In the midst of this campaign a mass meeting of all Federal Art Project workers was called at Textile High School. Twelve hundred project workers responded. This was the first time the whole project met as a single body. With one voice they demanded a stop to lay-offs, an expansion of W.P.A. to provide for the unemployed, and the setting up of a permanent Federal Art Project. Many prominent speakers, representing almost a complete cross section of community and cultural activities, supported the objectives of the meeting. Telegrams and letters of support poured in from Administration officials, heads of community and settlement houses, school officials, art patrons, etc.

The meeting was part of the program instituted by the Permanent Projects Committee. This committee, composed of delegates from the various locals of the City Projects Council on the Federal Art Project, has done excellent work. By unanimous vote this committee was delegated as a permanent body to carry on its duties.

Confronted with impending lay-offs and curtailment of the W.P.A. the need for united action was only too apparent. Plans for the amalgamation of all Art Project locals into a single body are being pushed forward rapidly. Any plan to curtail the Federal Art Project will in this manner be met with quick and vigorous action on the part of the entire Federal Art Project.

The central point of the meeting was the Federal Arts Bill drawn up by the Artists Union. This bill represents security for the artist. It provides for artists who are not now employed. It points the way to the only satisfactory solution of the problems facing the artists in all sections of the country. It offers

unlimited opportunities to enrich and advance the cultural life of the communities. Reprinted below are three important sections of the Federal Art Bill. When final work on this bill has been completed, the entire text will be printed in Art Front.

"Section 3. Each of said art centers shall register all artists within the territorial division which it serves who may apply to such art centers for employment, and each of such artists who are registered shall be employed by the regional art center as hereinafter provided and shall be paid during the period of such employment by the regional art center at a rate per hour for a minimum of twenty hours per week as the Regional Art Council shall determine will provide the artist sufficient for a reasonable standard of living for a professional person, based upon the average cost of living and the needs of a professional person in such region. All artists so employed shall be known as professional artists. There shall also be created employment for assistant or apprentice artists who shall also receive a twenty hour per week minimum at a rate to be established by the Regional Art Council in a similar manner as herein provided for the determination of compensation to professional artists.

"Section 5. The regional art center shall employ the artists registered with it for any and all types of art work, including (a) mural painting in public buildings, (b) decorative and monumental sculpture in public buildings, (c) easel painting, (d) sculpture for exhibition in travelling and loan exhibitions, (e) lithography, etching, wood-cuts and other graphic arts for travelling and loan exhibitions, (h) art research, (i) designing costumes and scenery on theatre projects, (j) decoration and embellishment of federal housing projects and similar enterprises and (k) teaching each of the above types of art work in art schools established under the administration of this bureau or in colleges and high schools under federal jurisdiction. ****

"Section 10. Funds for the maintenance and operation for each of the regional art centers and for the salaries to be paid to the artists shall be apportioned by the heads of this department from funds provided by the Federal Government. Fees or percentages shall be charged and collected by each of the art centers for the rental of pictures, and exhibitions, from sale of literature, brochures, monographs on art, from sale of art objects to public institutions, from nominal charges for lectures and classes, all of which shall be accounted for and turned over to the department. Additional revenue needed for the maintenance and operation of the art centers shall be raised by an annual tax of two and a half percent upon private art collections of the value of \$25,000.00 and over, said tax to be levied and collected and payable similar to the method provided by the collection and payment of income taxes by the Internal Revenue Department. All other funds shall be provided from the income and property taxes regularly levied by the Federal Government."

FOR A FARMER-LABOR PARTY

THE Presidential campaign approaches and President Roosevelt is busy trimming his political ship to meet pressure from the right. Cries of economy are met by curtailing relief. Hundreds of thousands whose only lifeline is the pitifully small W.P.A. wage are being cast adrift.

One of the outstanding features of the present regime is the enormous sums spent on armaments. The cultural life of the country is reaching a low ebb. Curtailment of funds for maintenance of public institutions have seriously crippled the sources of cultural life. Much of the material in libraries has become obsolete. Books on common technical subjects are sometimes twenty years behind, and therefore utterly useless. This state of decay

is noticed in antiquated and overcrowded schools and poorly and inadequately equipped hospitals, with undermanned personnel which are poorly paid. Vast numbers of professional workers are of course unemployed. In the face of these conditions, enormous armament appropriations are jammed through Congress.

The few ineffective reforms introduced by the N.R.A. have been swept away, most of them cleverly sabotaged by the administration. The rest were overwhelmed by legalistic methods employed by the Chambers of Commerce. Industry in many major lines has reached high levels of production. The stock market is booming and profits are soaring. On the other hand prices have gone up, wages have at best remained stationary, and unemployment has actually increased in Jan-

uary alone by well over 1,000,000.

Sections of the middle class, the professional groups, farmers and workers suffer alike from these conditions. They all want security, unemployment insurance, increased appropriations for a permanent W.P.A., old age pensions, and above all, peace. These are the minimum demands. It is obvious that neither of the present parties offers fulfillment of this minimum program. A new party to combine the interests of these groups is necessary. That is why the mass meeting called by the Permanent Projects Committee endorsed a resolution calling for a Farmer-Labor Party. That is why the formation of a Farmer-Labor Party is being urged by these groups in all sections of the country.

FRENCH ART TODAY

By Henri Barbusse

(A LAST INTERVIEW)

(Translator's Note—The following was given in the form of an interview to the Paris correspondent of the Soviet magazine, *Oktyabr* ("October"), in Paris, on August 8th, 1935. It is, accordingly, in all likelihood, Barbusse's last word on the subject of art, and one of his last—if not the last—public expressions on any topic. The translation has, of necessity, been made from the Russian.—Samuel Putnam.)

THEATRE

THE Occidental theatre of today has for some while now been experiencing an acute crisis, ideational and aesthetic. Antiquated art forms have come down to the present time practically unchanged. If there have been a few attempts at innovation in staging and stage decoration, they have not been highly successful.

At Paris, the well-known director, Jacques Copeau, as well as Jouvet and others, have engaged in theatrical experiments that are out of the beaten path and which are possessed of some artistic interest. But these efforts to introduce an element of novelty into the artistic

side of the performance, including the acting, have been for the most part devoid of any social significance and abortive in character.

The repertory of French theatres is a colorless one. The plays that are staged are extremely banal, on a low level artistically speaking, being designed to meet the tastes of the box-office public. They in no wise contribute to an understanding of life. Those dealing with adultery and other sexual themes are in the majority.

There are playwrights of ability in Paris, among them Henri Duvernois—but he, too, caters to the taste of a bourgeois audience and turns out light comedies with no social content. Among the outstanding French dramatists is Charles Vildrac, who is known in Moscow. His productions are marked by an unusual simplicity; they are very human and appealing.

France has as yet no noteworthy plays dealing with larger social themes. There have been, it is true, attempts to create a revolutionary theatre. There is at Paris an Association of Revolutionary Artists, which includes a dramatic section whose members look upon the theatre as a mode of revolutionary struggle, for the diffu-

sion of a revolutionary consciousness. In the French provinces there are collectives resembling the Soviet "Blue Blouses," who take part in street demonstrations in stage costume, and who also, on national holidays, put on revolutionary one-act plays. The French masses are in a position to enjoy a really fine piece by Vaillant Couturier and Léon Moussignac treating of the revolutionists of 1848, and another by Couturier on the Paris Commune.

French theatre managers have been waging a losing battle with the crisis. In view of the heavy falling off of box-office receipts and the taxes imposed on theatric productions, which are something to be reckoned with, the theatre owners decided to organize a strike of their own; and they succeeded in obtaining from the government some slight decrease in assessments. But this has proved to be no way out of the dilemma.

CINEMA

In the cinema the French theatre finds a formidable competitor. Cinema houses represent a less costly outlay and upkeep than does the theatre. The public flocks to them, especially those where American

gangster films are being shown, for these are very popular. But the quality of French films themselves is not appreciably higher than is the theatrical output.

French pictures, it may be noted, have a pronounced propagandistic tendency. There are whole series of news-reels and documentary films having to do with the colonies, military manoeuvres and the like, all of which is meant to serve the government's own ends. On the Fourteenth of July there were two demonstrations in Paris. One was on the part of a small group of Fascists, while the other was an enormous mass demonstration against war and in favor of the People's Front. Curiously enough, the news-reel which was put on in the motion picture houses showed only the Fascists, it being deemed unnecessary to notice the tremendous anti-war protest of the Parisian working class.

Soviet films have been very successful in France, where they are well received by audiences; for Soviet directors are in the world's front rank and their productions are altogether remarkable. This opinion is one that is shared by all; and there can be no doubt that, in spite of the censorship, Soviet pictures are slowly making their way upon the French screen. Some of those which have been shown in France, for instance Pudovkin's, have been greatly cut by the censor; but notwithstanding this, Soviet films enjoy an exceptional popularity with the French masses.

LITERATURE

What is true of the French theatre and cinema is in general to be observed in connection with French literature. That literature which is in the mode and pleasing to the bourgeoisie is one in no way to be distinguished from what has gone before, if one excepts a few improvements on the technical side.

ART

And now for French artists. There are many talented ones in France. But what of the present state of art? The mass of artists are dragging out a wretched existence, amid heavy material cares, and this naturally has its effect upon art as a whole. Many painters are forced to barter their pictures for bread and potatoes, a traffic which is frequently to be seen going on in the streets of Paris. Pictures on the whole are an object of shameless speculation. The canvases of Renoir and Cezanne, for example, were to be had very cheaply some while back. Then of a sudden they rose in price; and it transpired that speculators had bought up all these paintings in order to throw

them on the market at a much higher figure.

There is in France a small group of popular painters, Van Dongen, Domergue and others. There was a time not so long ago when Van Dongen produced some noteworthy canvases, but he speedily fell to hashing up cheap concoctions that would appeal to the bourgeois palate.

When Paul Signac died recently, he was hailed as one of the great masters of modern French painting; but his work belongs to an already outmoded school of representational art. French painters up to now have been greatly influenced by masters like Matisse, whose art in the hands of his followers is converted into something resembling stucco-work.

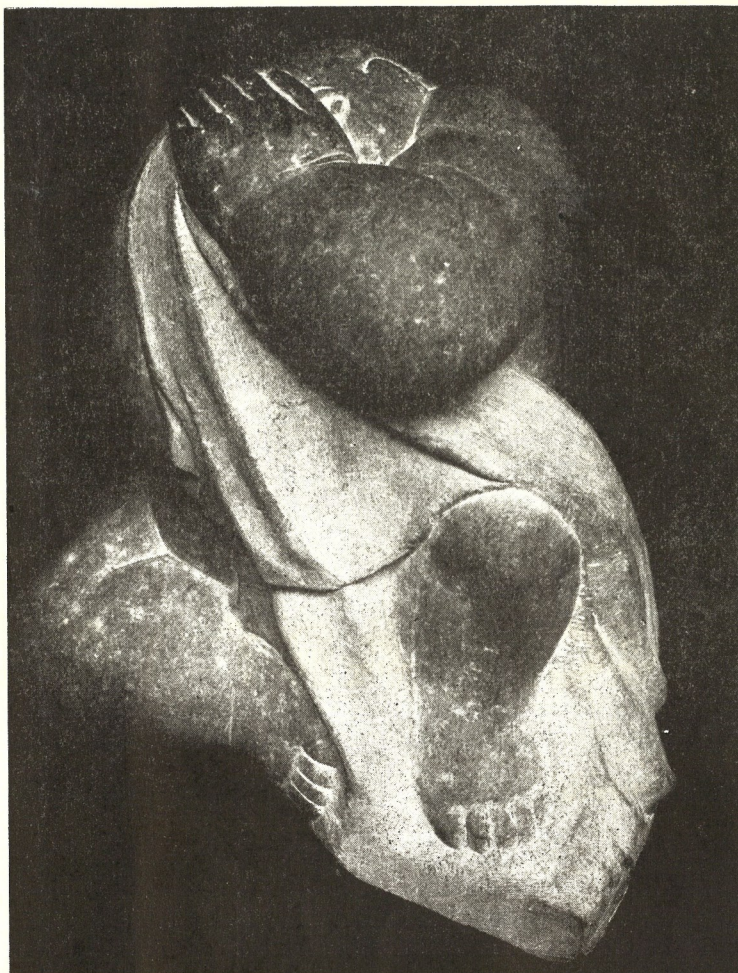
ARCHITECTURE

In architecture, likewise, the prospect is

none too dazzling. It is true that in France there are great architects, Corbusier and others, who have brought in a fresh impulse; but the appearance of present-day French cities is not at all in keeping with the spirit of this architectural vanguard. The architects do no more than follow their blueprints, in which there is no place for the artist's creative imagination.

Such, on all hands, is the state of contemporary French art.

As for myself, I am engaged at the moment on the scenario for a Soviet film, which is to be a continuation of the "Three Songs About Lenin," and in which I hope to be able to show the gigantic achievements of constructive socialism. The first draft of this scenario is already done, but I am still gathering and weeding out material to be woven into the finished production.



Fear

Alonzo Hauser

Photo by Yavno

THE ARTIST AND HIS AUDIENCE

By Max Weber

WHEN it was suggested that I write a paper on the Artist and His Audience to be read at this Congress, I was at a loss to know what to say on a subject which by its very nature is so paradoxical. Museums, galleries, schools boast of considerable numbers of visitors to their exhibitions in the course of an art season, still, when you consider the population of large communities, of large and small cities, the attendance is exceedingly small and more often quite negligible. I mean an audience that is heart and soul interested in the artist as a worker, as a human being with the same hopes and aspirations and needs as those of other workers.

The artist functions not only in a spiritual way but like a machinist, bricklayer or cobbler in the industrial sphere. Unfortunately art is still considered a luxury meant for the few, the privileged, for those favored by destiny.

A few decades ago an artist was considered an outcast altogether, an idler, one who amused himself with the Muses, a dreamer, a shirker. Exhibitions, galleries, art lectures, and museums were few and far between. In recent years, however, art interest has grown considerably, but is still slim compared to the audience an automobile or boat show enjoys. Even with this increase in the number of galleries and artistic activities, it is deplorable to contemplate the limited number of people an artist can reach. The art season is comparatively short, the opportunity to exhibit sadly limited and restricted, and consumption or sales nil.

Granting that an artist has an exhibition in a well located gallery, under favorable auspices and conditions, how many and what people can he reach in a fortnight or thereabout? A few friends and relatives, a fair number of questful serious art students, a few moneyless art lovers during week days, sprinkle of pocket-holed bargain hunters an hour before the close of the exhibition, a few aesthetes-art hair splitters in search of the twenty-fifth (abstract) dimension during the quiet hours of the afternoon. Others

quite insipid and some so far advanced that they leave even Buck Rogers of the twenty-fifth century millenium behind.

What happens at a one-man show happens at the large annual museum exhibition. A little review is written quite often by a biased and more often still by a tired, dull and undiscerning critic, an insignificant mention of some trifle that suits his fancy, a little evasion, sarcasm, a grain of venom, derision and jealousy, a little playboy quibble here and there, a touch of gossip, a measure of superficial art jargon; and our leading newspapers find it fit to print. Such shallowness, insincerity and cheap auction-room appraisal passes for art criticism. And what can we expect from the average layman who seeks for light in the current reviews of art after reading such reviews? Of course, there are exceptions. What interest can the greater portion of the mediocre press arouse in the reader and hungry art lover?

It would be a waste of time to mention the traveling loan exhibitions, the prizes and juries, the prefaces in the catalogs, written by the erudite art directors of the mausoleums. I mean museums and what they do for the artist. Often as not, a note of thanks and a catalog is sent to the artists, telling them what a great success the exhibition was, what it meant for the artistic uplift of the community. The pictures are returned, with a number on the too-often smashed frames and punctured canvas or broken glass. (Now, pay your rent, buy your clothes and food for yourself and family with the note of appreciation from the well-groomed, fat board of trustees of these museums and salaried directors.)

It seems to me, my comrades, and fellow artists, regardless of what innate talent or gifts we were favored with by the gods in order to obtain a hearing and a return reasonably commensurate with our creative gifts, we must live in the slums, lose our reason, cut off our ears and noses and finally commit suicide, if you hope for a considerable audience—a half century after our flight from this

planet. (But isn't it tragic enough to starve and suffer the pangs of anxiety and fear in the midst of plenty?)

The causes of the neglect of the artist and his limited audience are numerous, but the outstanding cause is the economic. For, how many in the population of a given area can find the time and leisure for cultural pursuits? How pitifully few people can visit galleries and the out-of-the-way museums. The art dealer who deals in work by living artists is by reason of the overhead expense and general maintenance confined to small and cramped stuck-away quarters. He is compelled to curtail his exhibitions. His as well as those artists' activities and genuine ambitions are stifled and their programs minced and hectic. The palatial spacious day-lit galleries in prominent, cosmopolitan centers are for the great dead and the masters of old.

The comedian, the hooligan, the wise-crack has an audience in the millions upon millions every hour, every day. The reason for this is simple and obvious. The joker is the novacaine in the struggle and agony of the daily existence of the great multitudes. Indirectly he sells you all sorts of trash and announces tainted news and fraudulent commodities.

Compare the number of art lectures, art courses and publications, the number of art schools with the carloads of pulp, variety and sex magazines and the bulk of the Sunday newspapers (not funnies) with the radio propaganda of tooth-paste, hair tonic, serials and macaroni and shoe polish with the cheap movie, the pool-rooms and other demoralizing institutions.

Why with so many vacant skyscraper lofts and armories and other spacious unoccupied and centrally located buildings, should artists be driven to show their work and offer it for sale on the sidewalk of Greenwich Village. What impression can such a showing make on even the most sympathetic and understanding spectator. Pictures guillotined on iron railings, tossed by the wind, soiled by the dust and shouted out, as it

were, by harsh out-of-door lighting. The grandest work of art would be mightily dimmed and its glow tarnished, cheapened, placed under similar conditions and uncongenial environment. These open-air art marts, received good-naturedly, nevertheless call to mind the horror and sadness of the scenes of evictions in the slums.

High-domed edifices, veritable palaces in size and proportion of metropolitan railroad terminals and armories, called banks, are built in the hundreds of thousands, all over the land of marble, granite, glass and brass for the mere counting of pennies and pieces of green paper, called money; for the housing in the cellars of military forts called safes and a few desks, cash registers and counters with clerks that look like ants in these vacant, space-wasted interiors (while art exhibitions, musicals with few exceptions are relegated to improvised, dingy, cramped interiors.)

Then we have the annual, independent artists' exhibition. Another makeshift. At such unimpressive, temporary exhibition places, the yellow journals and their reporters find it expedient and easy to display, or give vent to their cheap, vulgar wit at the expense of the bewildered, beaten and dispossessed artist and art student.

We seek not the 57th Street gallery,

robed in royal purple plush and trimmed with modern, chromium, furnished with wrought-iron lamps and cushioned lounges. You don't see the staid art dealers display their pictures on iron railings, on delapidated stoops, or in doorways over ash-cans. No! They must have their plush, brass shaded, dim light, uniformed attendance like Pullman waiters, little hot-house evergreen, tropical plants in private and cozy corners. A hushed atmosphere, a sanctimonious, ecclesiastical environment, engraved catalogs, with introductions and forewords by French critics for greater prestige, a stamp of imported goods from abroad. Such surroundings are more conducive and lending all around to the sale of their good and often spurious art to the industrial magnates.

In these palatial, life-lacking galleries, the art critic enters with humility and reverence. He is awed. A two or three column article with 36-inch square illustrations, headlines, captions follow. He is eloquent in his praise of the foreign and the dead, although truly bored and nagged with having to write and rewrite on the same subjects season after season. These grand, staid merchants of art have a special genius for resurrecting the dead and know how to keep the dead living. Only the profit system can breed such commercial wizards, parasites and opportunists.

What chance have we? Where and how shall the living find an audience?

When we are young, they advise us to make connections. We keep on connecting all our lives and in the end nearly most of us find ourselves connected with the poorhouse.

Still other and perhaps as grave impediments that tend to widen the gap between artist and audience are the million high-sounding manifestos of the countless prophets of the isms, the sly and copious self-appointed impresarios, the art healers, art benefactors that confuse, antagonize and in the end repel an audience.

Still another and outstanding factor that must be considered in an effort to augment the artists' audience is the perplexing question of subject matter as influenced and colored by the new social consciousness, which I believe will be solved sooner and better and naturally through closer ties between artists and the steadily growing class-conscious proletarian population. Subject matter expressing and revealing the life, poetry and power inherent in the great toiling awakening masses.

Now, in view of what I said, and much more that can be added, what is to be done? An answer to this question, my dear colleagues, must be found, and we shall not rest until then.



**Across the Tracks,
by Mark Perper**

*From Artists Union
1262 Project Exhibit*

"ART"

OR

POLITICAL POSTERS

By Michael Biro

Cannon Fodder,
by Michael Biro



Michael Biro

Plakat

THESE two conceptions would seem to hang together like Siamese twins. Every expert would say so and every reader would find it paradoxical to attempt to separate them. And yet such a separation unfortunately exists.

I once asked a renowned designer and builder of locomotives, who is a friend of mine, which were the most beautiful engines. He pointed out the so-called Pacific locomotive, at that time the most modern model, tremendously fine and imposing, and answered simply enough that the machine surpassed all others in speed, strength and endurance. Good machines are also beautiful. It should be the same way with the political poster. It does not matter how a poster is done, according to whose manner or to what technique;

if it is effective and attractive it is a good poster.

I have been designing political posters in nearly all the countries of Europe, principally in Hungary, for the past twenty-five years. Even those most prejudiced in Hungary's favor can scarcely say that it was ever an especially liberty-loving state. For the past thousand years up to the present day certain parties either found it impossible to pursue any propaganda or could only do so to an extremely limited extent. Perhaps it is owing to these very restrictions that posters have come into being which conjure the masses with all possible power and passion to throw off their chains. It is and always was a dangerous game and I even think that it is more difficult to create good agi-

tation posters in a democratic state in which they would in any case be permissible.

In my opinion the designing of political posters demands not only technical art and ability to draw but also that the artist should be in close touch with the masses of the people to whom his poster is to appeal. The artist who designs agitation posters must have grown up out of these masses and belong to them body and soul, must have a full and complete understanding of their wishes and convictions—must in fact be one with them. These posters intended to work upon the masses must be true art, drawn as simply and as comprehensibly as possible and always taking mass psychology into account. Of course posters with powerful

lightning-like lines are apt to exercise a far greater influence upon the masses than carefully and intricately finished posters or the so-called "objective" posters of the "neue Sachlichkeit". According to my idea, the political poster must be liberated altogether from the heavy burden of so-called "objectivity". Objective posters (that is, those dealing only with the naked object, freed of all imagination) are entirely out of place here. "Sachlichkeit" puts a brake upon the artist's energy and hinders every vigorous stroke with which he ought to hammer his poster into the public's head. The expression "Sachlichkeit" or objectivity now so popular (I believe it originated through imitating American drawings after photos or composite photos) may be suitable enough for various patent goods such as cog-wheels or automobiles, but it has no business intruding into political propaganda. Most political posters lack either art or conviction, sometimes both. Party successes are usually due to personal influence and propaganda by leaflets. But I cannot imagine that a poster with the more or less badly-drawn portrait of a party leader or president can be attractive enough to hold the

attention of the masses engaged in fighting for their freedom against oppression. Such a poster ought to be something to open the eyes of the population interested, to force them to think—something which works upon their feelings at first sight.

I consider it to be impossible that a political poster should with a mere alteration in text be made to serve equally well as propaganda for young gymnasts, open-air athletics or a campaign to "Eat More Fish!" A political poster is not a poster advertising goods, which I might use today for one soap factory and tomorrow for its rival. The artist who designs political posters must not be confounded with the advocate who represents the plaintiff today and the defendant tomorrow. The artists who set themselves to design political propaganda posters must have the courage of their convictions, otherwise it is impossible for them to design convincing and effective posters. I consider it immoral for an artist to design for various political parties simultaneously, and just because it is immoral, such posters can never attain the end in view. I would like to cite one example from my own experience as to the way in which a political poster ought to come in-

to being—it is an example out of many. I refer to a poster well-known to all experts and remembered no doubt by hundreds of thousands—the so-called "cannon fodder" poster, which I designed before the first mobilization of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy against Serbia. This poster was commissioned at seven o'clock one evening, drawn direct upon the stone in two colors and by eight o'clock next morning it was already posted up everywhere. Half an hour later mounted police were charging wildly around attempting with drawn swords to disperse the masses collected before the advertising pillars. The police cut the posters to pieces with their swords wherever they found them, but the enthusiastic public persistently stuck up fresh copies. Shortly afterwards the crowds had mounted the poster on staves and thousands and thousands marched about the town with them and by 12 o'clock noon a general strike was already in progress. The poster had incomparably more to say to the people than a hundred revolutionary leading articles. For those who aspire to design political posters I know no better guide than the motto:

"He puts his creed into posters."

RACE, NATIONALITY AND ART

A C C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

Editor, ART FRONT:

Mr. Meyer Schapiro in his article on Race, Nationality and Art, in which he sets out to level down to the earth the "presumed racial character of art," puts up a warning to those who might dissent that is truly alarming. Says he: "The arguments for racial and national peculiarity are supported by the most reactionary groups in America." He further says: "Such distinctions in art have been a large element in the propaganda for war and fascism . . ." After such admonitions and threats, the person who holds different views from Mr. Schapiro must stop and think twice before he can suffer himself to become an outcast and a traitor to his people or to a great cause. However, let me not be swayed by considerations

of fear, if what I have to say is the truth as I see it.

Mr. Schapiro holds that nationality is an illusion and nationalism a source of danger. I am not alone in thinking that nationalism can be a source of great good; and as to its being an illusion, the most valid argument against that notion is the strong fact of its being.

Hitler and Mussolini have, of course, made the word "nationalism" suspect. But it is only their brand of nationalism that is despicable, having been exploited as an instrument of barbaric cruelty. Their nationalism is that fiercely aggressive, histrionic hocus-pocus, sustained by flags and cannons, with a most accomplished ventriloquist holding the middle of the stage and speaking the lines for a dumb-struck people.

Such frantic nationalism is certainly not conducive to the peace and happiness of the rest of us. And such nationalism, though of a somewhat modified and a subtler kind, I must say, prevails in the world at this day and age. Avaricious nations, like avaricious individuals, have always subjugated other weaker peoples. See how Mr. Schapiro would come to the rescue of these weaker submerged peoples; you, Chinese, Hindus, Negroes, Jews, Egyptians, Ethiopians, forget that you are distinct nations and races. Stop flaunting the white flags of your cultural and historical heritage in the faces of your neighbors and masters (whom no like intimations of mine will ever persuade). Practice the art of forgetting. Forget your Bibles and Korans, your traditions, your history, your lore and

your language, your national heroes and ideals, your body of laws and moral teachings. Shall we not rather come to these peoples and say: Within each of you is a wholesome sense of life, perhaps momentarily dormant; the memory of a great ideal at one time or another in your historical life. Invoke that Ideal, in the light of this new day, live in it and you shall be morally the equal of any other stronger national group.

This is to go for all that live in the shadow and the chains of other nations.

I would not call for walls and fortifications around these reborn national groups. They must live an inclusive rather than an exclusive life, as is fitting in the open-flung world of today. Inclusive in

what they experience and absorb, exclusive in what they give—like the artist. Let me explain. In the enjoyment of art we are eclectic, the range of the whole world is not too wide. All of us love French painting and prose writing, English poetry, the Mexican mural, Hindu sculpture, German and Russian music, Chinese painting and poetry. We delight in the Negro spiritual and dance, Jewish musicianship, the Psalms, and the visions of the Hebrew prophets. All of us love all these things and much more. But the creative spirit is exclusive and particular. He may take over the style and the handwriting from his neighbors, due to this wide, free, joyous inpouring of many cultures. But if he is authentic and not

merely a virtuoso or eclectic, or a trailer-along, the artist will not fail to reveal his identification with the national and cultural group he springs from, in a manner, it is true, that may prove intangible and escape the critical intelligence of Mr. Schapiro. But it is there for those to see who can and will.

Then let us frankly accord each artist this right he is enjoying nevertheless. Do not wish to take away from the artists of the minority peoples particularly, their own cultural heritage when you offer them yours, in the manner of religious missionaries. Tolerate but each one to develop his own in the open sight of all—and we shall perhaps all be the wiser for it in time.

—JENNINGS TOFEL.

M R . S C H A P I R O R E P L I E S

Editor, Art Front:

I beg Mr. Tofel to read my article again and to read it more carefully. He will not find in it the opinions he imputes to me and attacks with such feeling. Nowhere do I say that nationalism does not exist or that artists are unaffected by their national and cultural groups. Nor do I call upon artists and oppressed peoples to give up their traditional cultures. I try to show rather that the culture or nation to which an artist belongs affects him more deeply than his so-called blood heritage. This culture is not uniform or permanent, but is conditioned by natural, social, economic and historical circumstances. Psychological or cultural characteristics in art have never been explained scientifically by a presumed racial or national spirit rooted in the blood of a people. There is no known connection between the peculiar physical types in a nation or ethnic group and their cultural achievements.

If we criticize the effort of some Negro liberals to revive older African arts as the racial culture of the modern Negroes, we do so, not because we despise these arts, but because such a return to a remote past would weaken the modern Negro in his struggle for equality and freedom. It would only accentuate his present exclusion from the most advanced forms of modern culture.

An oppressed people, in its struggle for independence, does not fight simply to maintain its historical traditions. It can win the fight only to the degree that it

uses modern weapons and assimilates the lessons of European revolutionary struggles. Its traditional customs and institutions are double-edged; they may serve as the basis for asserting the human capacities of the oppressed group and its claims to political and cultural autonomy. But these customs and traditions may also be a brake on such aspirations; they may teach passivity, conservatism, submission. The Koran, which Mr. Tofel is so anxious to have the Arabs remember, supports slavery and calls upon servants to respect their masters; it also consigns women to the harem. The traditions of China have been used to suppress the revolutionary zeal of the Chinese masses, not to encourage it.

Therefore, in supporting the struggles of oppressed peoples for political emancipation, we do not accept all their slogans, traditions and claims as equally valid, and worthy of preservation. It is one thing to encourage the effort of a struggling people to maintain its own language and customs and arts; cultural reawakening is a powerful, and often indispensable, factor, in the fight for freedom. But it is quite another thing to suppose that these customs and arts represent an inherent psychological peculiarity, independent of history and rooted in a supposed racial or constant national character. That would only play into the hands of the oppressors, whose intellectual agents, often archaeologists and ethnologists, have maintained that the primitive peoples are unchangeably primitive and

inferior, and cannot produce science, industry and modern thought. The Egyptologist, Petrie, wrote that only what is self-evolved in the mind of a people can really endure or be effective. What does this mean? That the colonial peoples cannot attain the levels of Western culture, that these are beyond the mentality of Africans and Asiatics, that Europeans must remain in control, for the natives could not possibly preserve or develop what they themselves have not created. As colonial peoples become more rebellious, their oppressors sometimes show an increasing solicitude for certain native customs and arts, as a means of retarding the struggle for independence; and in this, they are aided by scholars and aesthetes who write "sympathetically" of the picturesque beauty and traditions of the old-fashioned primitive life and art.

A concluding word about "good" and "bad" nationalism. In making this distinction, Mr. Tofel is not very clear and opens the way for further confusions. He falls into the error of attributing wars to "avaricious" nations, and of describing fascism as the exploitation and perversion of an essentially healthy nationalism. Wars are not due to "avaricious nations", but to the needs of the dominating classes of capitalist nations; they need new lands for raw materials, for new markets or new fields of investment. Or they fight in order to consolidate their possessions or to maintain a threatened status quo.

MEYER SCHAPIRO.



Imperialism,
by Theodore Haupt

E X H I B I T I O N S

A. C. A.—52 W. 8th St.—Japanese painters. April 20-May 2. Midwestern Group. May 4-16. American Place—Stieglitz—509 Madison Ave. Water colors and oils by Arthur Dove, excellent experimental modern. April 15-May 15. Another Place—43 W. 8th St.—David Arkin. Paintings. Through May. Argent Galleries—42 W. 57 St.—Water colors by Dora Forster. May 11-23. Artists' Union—430 Sixth Ave. Another large Project exhibition starting May 7. Bignou—32 E. 57 St. Remarkable tapestry show by moderns, Rouault, Picasso etc. Through May 15. Contemporary Arts—41 W. 54 St. Sigmund Kozlow, April 13-May 2. Downtown Gallery—113 W. 13 St. Work of Davis, Zorach, Fiene etc. Valentine Dudensing—69 E. 57 St. 19th and 20th century French painters. April 27-May 16. Kleeman—38 E. 57 St. Drawings and etchings by F. Schmutzer. May 4-30. Julien Levy—602 Madison Ave. Work of the leading surrealists and neo-

romantics. Pierre Matisse—51 E. 57 St. African, Oceanic and primitive American sculpture. One of those rare displays this gallery is noted for. April 15-May 7. Midtown Galleries—605 Madison Ave. Paul Meltsner. Water colors and oils. April 20-May 9. Drawings of Minna Citron. April 27-May 9. Museum of Modern Art—11 West 54 St. Painters as illustrators. April 19-May 10. A summer retrospective will follow. New Art Circle—Neumann—509 Madison Ave. Work of Klee, Kandinsky, Weber, Kopman. No painter can afford to miss this gallery's substantial fare. Dorothy Paris—56 W. 53 St. Fourth Anniversary Exhibit. Through May 10. Mrs. C. J. Sullivan—57 E. 56 St. Ethel Haven. April 20-May 5.

A Graphic Arts exhibition opens at the Federal Art Project Gallery on April 22 and extends through May 2. The exhibition will present 130 examples of prints by the 80 artists working on the Graphic Arts Project.

A portfolio of five lithographs by Kuni-

yoshi, Harry Gottlieb, Stuart Davis, Eugene Fitch and Raphael Soyer has been published by The American Artists School, 131 West 14 St., N. Y. C. at the unusual price of ten dollars for the series.

The Post-Surrealist group from California is scheduled to open at the Brooklyn Museum the last week of April with a comprehensive show of their subjective classicism. The movement has been represented in numerous exhibits in the west, the largest and most important having been at the new San Francisco Museum this last winter.

In the Brooklyn show six artists, Lorser Feitelson, Helen Lundeberg, Lucien Labaudt, Helen Klokke, Knud Merrill and Grace Clements will exhibit widely different interpretations of Post-Surrealism, ranging in style from neo-classic to abstract modern, and in content from abstract philosophical themes to that of contemporary social subjects.

J. S.

CALL FOR AN EASTERN DISTRICT CONVENTION OF ARTISTS' UNIONS

TO All Artists' Organizations, Groups and Artists' Unions in the Eastern District of the United States of America, concerned with the economic security of artists:

You are hereby invited to send delegates to the first Eastern District Convention of Artists' Unions to be held in New York City on May 8th, 9th, 10th.

The objectives of this convention are the formation of a National Artists' Union organization; coordination and planning of programs and activities that will work for the protection and betterment of the artists' economic interests; and the establishment of a permanent National Art Project.

Discussion will take place on the following subjects: Organization of artists on a trade union basis; report of delegates; the Federal Art Projects, mural, sculpture, easel, teaching and applied art; the Federal Art Bill; Commercial Artists' Organization; Municipal Art Galleries and Centers; Open Air Shows; the Rental Policy; Public and Trade Union Support of Art; Suppression and Censorship of Art and Artists on projects; ART FRONT; etc.

Further and detailed information may be had by writing to the National Organizing Committee, New York Artists' Union, 430 Sixth Avenue, New York City.

**NEW YORK CITY
MAY 8th, 9th, 10th**

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

To meet the general call for information about the New York Artists' Union, the ART FRONT has established this department as a permanent feature of the magazine. It will be under the auspices of the National Correspondence Committee of the New York Artists' Union. It will contain information given in answer to the numerous questions asked about the organizational problems of organizing artists' groups on an economic basis, the artistic standards of the new organizations and particular local problems of each group. It will also feature articles and correspondence from artists, artists' organizations and affiliated groups throughout the country.

THE Eastern District Artists' Union Convention is the first convention of its kind to be held on strictly economic issues for professional artists. This marks an historic occasion in art history. The rapidly increasing response to the need for economic organization on the part of artists is being evidenced by reports from every part of the United States.

No longer can any one artists' organization depend upon its local organization for the support of its economic program. The national scope of the federal art project, the rental policy, and the many issues that affect artists, demand national organization.

This convention, to be held on May 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th, will begin the process towards a national organization. While this convention is a convention of the Artists' Unions of the Eastern District, it invites all interested artists' organizations to participate in it and in all the actions of the Artists' Unions for economic security of all artists.

On May 7th, the public session will bring forward the general economic issues and problems that affect all artists.

On May 8th, the morning will be occupied by a tour and inspection trip through the works of the Federal Art Project of New York City, to be arranged by the New York Artists' Union. The afternoon will be occupied with reports and discussion of the work, history and program of the many Artists' Unions in the Eastern District and interested artists' organizations.

On Saturday, May 9th, in the afternoon, discussion will be held on the various aspects of the Federal Art Projects, the mural, easel painting, sculpture, poster and applied arts and teaching of art to children and adults. Conditions on present projects will be discussed, and a program planned for future work in all fields of public art.

Saturday evening, May 9th, special committee meetings will be held, after being elected by the delegate body, for resolutions and the program of the National body. Separate committee meetings will be held for art students, art teachers, and commercial artists, which all delegate-artists interested will attend.

Sunday, May 10th, will be taken up with discussion on the Municipal Gallery and Center, open air shows, qualification for membership in Artists' Unions, Federal Art Bill, ART FRONT, etc.

The discussion on Sunday afternoon, May 10th, will be on resolutions and program of resolutions committee and election of Eastern District officers.

A farewell party will be held on Sunday evening, May 10th, for the out-of-town delegates. Music, dancing, entertainment and refreshments.

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